

Message Text

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R 071944Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7838

INFO USMISSION USBERLIN

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 02191

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: SPD LEADERSHIP: BRANDT'S ROLE AND PROSPECTS

REF: BONN 14522, SEPT 13, 1974

SUMMARY: THE SCHMIDT-BRANDT-WEHNER SPD TRIUMVIRATE IS AN UNEASY COALITION AT BEST, WITH PERSONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE THREE MEN STRAINED AND COOL. DESPITE PERSONAL DIFFERENCES, HOWEVER, THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP SITUATION IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE THROUGH THE 1976 NATIONAL ELECTION. THE SPD IS FACED WITH ENOUGH DIFFICULTIES AT PRESENT AND CAN HARDLY AFFORD THE LUXURY OF A LEADERSHIP BRAWL. BRANDT HAS RECOVERED SOMEWHAT FROM THE DEPTHS OF HIS POST-RESIGNATION LOW, BUT HE IS THOUGHT TO BE LOSING
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GROUND WITHIN THE PARTY AND HE IS ECLIPSED IN THE PUBLIC

MIND BY SCHMIDT. BRANDT WANTS TO HOLD ON TO THE NOMINAL LEADERSHIP AS PARTY CHAIRMAN, AND WILL PROBABLY SUCCEED IN DOING SO AT LEAST UNTIL 1976, BUT ANY HOPES HE MAY HAVE OF RE-EMERGING AS A POTENTIAL CHANCELLOR ARE UNLIKELY TO BE FULFILLED ON A PRESENT READING OF THE PROSPECTS. END SUMMARY

1. A COMPLEX MAN WITH A HABIT OF WITHDRAWING DURING PERIODS OF DEPRESSION (GOING BACK TO THE TIME WHEN HE WAS GOVERNING MAYOR OF BERLIN), THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT BRANDT WAS DESPONDENT FOLLOWING HIS RESIGNATION IN 1974 AS CHANCELLOR. AS CAN BE SEEN IN HIS BOOK, "BEYOND THE PRESENT", BRANDT FELT THAT HE WAS POORLY SERVED BY HIS FRIENDS AND FORCED TO ACCEPT MORE THAN A JUST (AT LEAST AS HE SAW IT) SHARE OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GUILLAUME AFFAIR. RECENTLY, HE APPEARS TO HAVE COME OUT OF HIS MORE DEPRESSED STATE. HOWEVER, AS ONE OF HIS ASSISTANTS SAID, HE WILL NEVER AGAIN BE THE "FIGHTING WILLY BRANDT OF THE BERLIN DAYS, PARTLY BECAUSE HE IS OLDER AND PARTLY BECAUSE OF WHAT HE HAS GONE THROUGH." HE HAS BECOME MORE PUBLICLY ACTIVE IN RECENT WEEKS AND ANNOUNCED PLANS TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES IN MARCH (HE HOPES TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY), TO VISIT THE SOVIET UNION IN MAY AT THE INVITATION OF BREZHNEV, AND TO VISIT GREECE LATER IN THE YEAR. SOME PARTY OFFICIALS ALSO CLAIM THAT HE HAS, IN FACT, BEEN ACTIVE WITHIN THE PARTY BUT WITHOUT PUBLICITY.

2. BRANDT HAS COME UNDER CRITICISM WITHIN THE SPD FOR HIS LACK OF FIRM AND DECISIVE LEADERSHIP. THESE CHARGES COME MOSTLY FROM THE RIGHT-WING WHO FEEL THAT HE SHOULD CRACK DOWN ON SOME OF THE MORE VOCAL LEFTISTS. FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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EXAMPLE, THE "SEWER WORKERS" (KANALARBEITER), THE INFLUENTIAL ORGANIZATION OF RIGHT-WING SPD MEMBERS IN THE BUNDESTAG, WHOSE MEMBERS HAVE IN THE PAST SUPPORTED BRANDT PRIVATELY ARE CRITICAL OF HIS LACKLUSTER LEADERSHIP. AT THE SAME TIME, OTHERS (E.G., CENTER AND LEFT-WING SPD MEMBERS) FEEL THAT BRANDT AS A PARTY LEADER IS STILL VERY POPULAR AMONG THE RANK AND FILE AND EFFECTIVE AS AN "INTEGRATOR" OF THE VARIOUS FACTIONS WITHIN THE

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PARTY. THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY, THEY POINT OUT, HAS ALWAYS HAD INTERNAL DIFFERENCES (EVEN WORSE IN THE PAST THAN IT IS TODAY, THEY SAY) AND BRANDT'S ABILITY TO HOLD THE ORGANIZATION TOGETHER WILL BE AN ASSET IN THE DIFFICULT ELECTIONS AHEAD. EVEN BRANDT'S DEFENDERS ADMIT HOWEVER THAT HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO PUBLICLY CRITICIZE THE MORE VOCAL LEFTISTS COULD HURT THE SPD AMONG GERMAN VOTERS AT LARGE.

3. THE RELATIONS AMONG THE TOP THREE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS
-- CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT, FRAKTION LEADER WEHNER AND

WILLY BRANDT -- RANGE BETWEEN COOL AND FROSTY BUT THE
THREE, BY NECESSITY, COOPERATE. BRANDT FEELS THAT
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WEHNER, PERHAPS WITH THE COLLUSION OF SCHMIDT, WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN FORCING HIS RESIGNATION AS CHANCELLOR. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THERE HAVE BEEN INCHOATE ATTEMPTS BY ONE GROUP OR ANOTHER WITHIN THE SPD TO UNSEAT WEHNER AS FRAKTION LEADER OR BRANDT AS PARTY LEADER. HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT ALL THREE ARE SO FIRMLY ENTRENCHED THAT ANY WELL ORGANIZED ATTEMPT TO UNSEAT THEM WOULD CREATE A STRUGGLE THAT COULD BE EXTREMELY DETRIMENTAL TO THE PARTY WHICH FACES IMPORTANT ELECTIONS.

4. AS OF NOW IT WOULD APPEAR THAT BRANDT, WHO IS EXPECTED TO RUN FOR REELECTION AS PARTY LEADER AT THE SPD CONGRESS IN NOVEMBER, WEHNER AND SCHMIDT WILL CONTINUE THEIR PRESENT DIVISION OF LABOR AND THEIR UNEASY CO-OPERATION THROUGH THE 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS. WHAT BRANDT'S FUTURE PLANS ARE BEYOND THAT POINT ARE NOT CLEAR. HIS CLOSEST AIDES CLAIM THAT HE HAS NO DESIRE TO BE CHANCELLOR AGAIN BUT GIVEN BRANDT'S FEELING OF "BETRAYAL" AND HIS PSYCHOLOGICAL MAKEUP IT'S NOT CERTAIN THAT HE DOES NOT COVET THE CHANCELLORSHIP AGAIN. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE A SITUATION WHICH WOULD PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR HIM TO BECOME CHANCELLOR AGAIN. NOW AND THEN THERE ARE RUMORS ABOUT BRANDT TAKING A PRESTIGIOUS INTERNATIONAL JOB (E.G., SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS). ONE FACTOR THAT COULD CHANGE THE PRESENT SITUATION WILL BE THE FATE OF THE PARTY IN THE NRW ELECTIONS. IF THE SPD TAKES A SEVERE BEATING AT THE POLLS, THE SEARCH FOR A SCAPEGOAT COULD LEAD TO WILLY BRANDT'S DOORSTEP AND INCREASE THE MOMENTUM FOR A CHANGE IN THE PARTY LEADERSHIP. AT THE PRESENT TIME HOWEVER IT APPEARS THAT BRANDT WILL REMAIN CHAIRMAN OF THE SPD AT LEAST THROUGH THE 1976 NATIONAL ELECTIONS.
HILLENBRAND

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